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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 004340

SIPDIS

ALSO FOR MNF-I NORTH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2014

TAGS: PREL PTER PHUM IZ TU

SUBJECT: TERRORISTS IN IRAQ MURDER TURKISH HOSTAGE;
TRUCKING ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR HALT TO SHIPPING INTO IRAQ
AS GOT CONSIDERS NEXT STEPS

REF: A. STATE 166182

1B. STATE 166961

Classified By: PolMilCouns Timothy A. Betts for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary

11. (U) This is an action request. Please see para. 11.

12. (C) Turkish MFA confirmed Aug. 2 the murder of a Turkish citizen who had been held hostage in Iraq. In response to this and other recent murders of Turkish truckers in Iraq, a major association of Turkish trucking companies called for a ban on Turkish trucks going into Iraq in support of coalition forces. Some major Turkish trade associations have condemned the ban. A Turkish MFA official complained to PolMilOff that coalition security measures for trucking convoys in Iraq are inadequate and must be improved. On Aug. 3 he repeated this complaint and asked that we formally pass this to Washington.

MFA believes that four truckers and one additional Turkish civilian have been murdered in recent days, and that two or three Turks are hostages. FonMin Gul told the press Aug. 2 that Iraq is the biggest threat in the region, but added that Turkey will continue to engage in Iraq. We request Washington's guidance para. 11 on security measures we take for U.S.-contracted trucks in Iraq. Preliminary GOT responses to reftel demarches on Iraq in paras. 12 and 13.

End summary.

MFA Confirms Death of Turkish Hostage, Criticizes Coalition Security for Convoys

13. (C) When PolMilOff arrived at MFA Aug. 2 to deliver ref a demarche, MFA Iraq Department Chief Mehmet Kemal Bozay confirmed to us that a Turkish "trucker," Murat Yuce, who had apparently been held hostage by the Zarqawi group had been murdered. The killing was shown on the Internet. He said the senior leadership in the Ministry was going to meet later August 2 to make a policy assessment of the situation.

14. (C) Bozay added that he had seen press reports indicating that the International Transporters Association (ITA), a body representing Turkish trucking companies, had released a statement indicating that Turkish truckers would halt transport of goods for the U.S. military in Iraq. Such a development would be "very serious," Bozay said. Bozay also complained to PolMilOff that he understood that U.S. military security escorts for trucking convoys were inadequate: normally only one jeep or APC for up to 30 trucks, and that the U.S. vehicle often sped far ahead of the pack "at 130 or 140 kilometers per hour." Bozay said he had been told that the lead vehicle did not stop if one of the trucks in the convoy had a mechanical problem or was fired upon.

15. (C) When Bozay and PolMilOff met again Aug. 3, Bozay requested that we forward to Washington Ankara's complaint regarding convoy security. He said that this is Ankara's chief concern in this matter. PolMilOff responded by citing security measures the coalition has taken to protect truckers, such as having fuel trucks empty their loads in Mosul as opposed to pushing further into Iraq. Bozay said he appreciated this information, and even interrupted our meeting to pass this information to his boss, Director General for Middle East Tahsin Burcuoglu, who was at that moment chairing a meeting of ministry officials as well as the ITA and other trucking associations in Turkey on next steps in this issue. MFA officials will then present their findings to FonMin Abdullah Gul upon his return to Ankara Aug. 4, and he would decide how to proceed, including how to engage the U.S. on this issue. Bozay emphasized, however, that the GOT's overall policy to contribute to the stabilization of Iraq had not changed. He said that MFA "was not behind" the ITA's call for a ban on trucking to Iraq.

ITA Calls for Ban on Trucking to Iraq, But Effect Unclear

16. (SBU) In announcing the ban on trucking to Iraq, ITA head Cahit Soysal told the press Aug. 2 that "In today's

conditions there is no security for drivers in Iraq. Until security can be guaranteed we have stopped transporting goods for U.S. forces." However, preliminary reporting from the Habur crossing from Turkey to Iraq indicates that truck traffic to Iraq has been moving at normal levels. Fuel and humanitarian shipments have reportedly not been affected so far, although AmConsul Adana PO reported near the border Aug. 3 that traffic on the road was lighter than normal.

Meanwhile, both the Union of Turkish Exporters and another transport association, RODER, said that ITA made the wrong choice, and the head of the Turco-Iraqi Business Council told the press that trade between Turkey and Iraq would continue.

Yuce Not a Trucker, but Four Turkish Truckers
Reportedly Killed So Far

¶17. (SBU) Though the Turkish press initially identified Yuce as a trucker, his company, Bilintur, told AmConsul Istanbul PolEconOff that Yuce was a plumber, not a trucker. Bilintur is a subcontractor responsible for the laundry at a U.S. base. MFA official Bozay added that another Bilintur employee, Abdulrahman Gezmen, had been killed in the same incident in which Yuce was seized.

¶18. (C) Bozay told PolMilOff that four truckers have been killed in convoys in coalition support since mid-July, most of them in the past 10 days. Bozay said that MFA believes two Turks who were in coalition-supported trucking convoys are currently hostages: Abdullahrahman Demir and Sayid Unurlu. Finally, another trucker, Tefik Alkan, has not been heard from since July 26.

FonMin Gul: Iraq the Greatest Regional Danger, but Still Our Neighbor

¶19. (U) On Aug. 2, Turkish FonMin Gul told the press that "Iraq is the greatest potential danger for the region." He said Turkey was working in both "visible" and "invisible" ways to seek the release of other Turks held hostage there. Gul added that the GOT was seeking Iraq's "stability and peace as a neighbor. However, as you can see there is a serious security problem there. Every day almost 100 Iraqis are being killed. Our relations will remain as relations with a neighboring country." (Comment: We read Gul's final remark as a sign that the GOT does not wish to disengage from Iraq. When PolMilOff raised this point to Bozay, he confirmed that this is what the FonMin meant. End comment.)

¶10. (C) When PolMilOff asked what Gul meant by "visible and invisible" means, Bozay responded that the Turkish embassy in Baghdad was asking other missions there--especially those who have also had their citizens kidnapped--for assistance in a sort of informal information exchange. Bozay was firm that the GOT does not pay ransom for Turkish hostages and does not encourage companies to do so, though he admitted that some companies may do so anyway.

Action Request

¶11. (C) We doubt that the convoy security system is as inadequate as Bozay portrayed. We request Washington advise us of what procedures MNF-I employs in protecting convoys of trucks crossing the Habur Gate carrying coalition and humanitarian supplies. (We understand commercial traffic proceeds at its own risk.)

Iraq Demarches: Status Report

¶12. (C) In response to ref a demarche (condemning hostage taking and murders), Bozay told PolMilOff that he would present our points to the MFA's senior leadership meeting the afternoon of Aug. 2. He said that he personally could see merit in an OIC statement on terrorism in Iraq, noting that "from time to time" the OIC Secretary General issued statements on current events. Following up, he told PolMilOff Aug. 3 that this issue would soon be placed before FonMin Gul.

¶13. (S) On ref b demarche (Syria-Iraq border security), Bozay responded that our point about Zarqawi insurgents crossing into Iraq from Syria carries special resonance, given that it was apparently Zarqawi's people who murdered a Turkish citizen. Bozay made no commitments, but said he would pass our message up the line in MFA and get back to us.

¶14. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
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